

## CHANGE OF USE FROM CLASS E TO APARTHOTEL (CLASS C1) AT UPPER FLOORS AND PART OF GROUND FLOOR, 46-52 FOREGATE STREET, CHESTER (24/01757/FUL)

### CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY COMMENTS

#### 1.0 Proposed Use of the Site for a Hotel

1.1 The Chester Archaeological Society welcomes proposals to bring unused upper floors back into use. However, we have to question the commercial viability of the present scheme. Regarding the proposed hotel on the site of the former Mecca bingo hall at Brookdale Place (23/03823/FUL), the planning officer substantiated our doubts concerning its likely viability but asserted that CWaC was powerless to take this into consideration in determining the application. Is the market for aparthotels different? It remains the case that *National Planning Policy Framework* para 135 is relevant: 'Developments: [should] function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development'. If use as an aparthotel failed, would conversion into ordinary apartments be practical?

#### 2.0 Archaeology

- 2.1 Five archaeological trenches were excavated at 46-50 Foregate Street, in the northern part of the site, before redevelopment in 1961. There have also been excavations nearby at nos 54-60 in 1971, no 56 in 1936, no 62 in 1956, in Love Street in 1936 and in Priory Place in 1989. The main discoveries were the remains of Roman buildings (of timber and stone), ditches, wooden stakes and clay surfaces, with some medieval rubbish pits above. Waterlogging was encountered at no 56 Foregate Street. The Roman remains at 46-50 Foregate Street lay at 1.0m to 1.5m below the then ground surface.
- 2.2 In most cases the investigations in the area were small scale and the remains found were consequently fragmentary, difficult to interpret and individually not of great significance. However, collectively they form an important part of our evidence for the civilian settlement outside one of three Roman permanent legionary fortresses in Britain and are therefore of international significance. The area lies within one of Chester's Primary Archaeological Character Zones, as defined in the *Chester Archaeological Plan*, where the default position is that development should preserve archaeological remains *in situ*.
- 2.3 The main groundworks associated with the development seem to be a lift pit within the footprint of the present buildings and extensions to the rear. It would appear that, fortuitously, the position of the lift pit coincides with Trench 5 of the 1961 excavation (and the position may therefore be archaeologically sterile). Leaving that possibility aside, depending on its depth, the pit may not reach significant archaeology. Nevertheless, because of the inevitable uncertainties, the lift pit should be excavated archaeologically.
- 2.4 There has been no previous archaeological investigation at the rear of the site. Archaeological remains can reasonably be expected but their character and depth are uncertain. An evaluation should accordingly be carried out and foundations (and services) designed that intrude minimally into significant archaeology.

### **3.0 Design**

- 3.1 The present building presents a competent but undistinguished three-storey, centralised three-bay neo-Georgian façade to Foregate Street, with two storeys behind. The proposal involves alterations to the fenestration of the facade, the addition of overall brick diaper work in a strongly contrasting colour, and the raising of the whole building to four storeys, with the topmost storey presenting a pitched roof parallel to Foregate Street with three large tile-hung gables set back from the facade.
- 3.2 In the context of Foregate Street, with its mixture of buildings, the increase in height is acceptable, as is the alteration to the fenestration. However, stylistically the proposals comprise a remarkably incongruous mixture of Arts and Crafts additions and detailing to a post-war 'Georgian derivative' structure. The overall, dark-coloured diaper work is crude, creates an unwelcome uniform effect and competes with the prominent half-timbering of no 44 to the west. If it is to be used at all to enliven what would otherwise be a rather bland façade, it should be used minimally to break up the façade (eg on the central bay only) and should be smaller and more subtle. The proposed large gables are wholly inappropriate to the Georgian-style facade. To stand a chance of looking satisfactory they would need to be flush with the façade (with the sacrifice of the roof-top terrace) and even so would be difficult to integrate them with the rhythm of the lower storeys. A mansard-style roof with smaller dormer windows might suit the style of the façade better.
- 3.3 Like many along Foregate Street, the rear of nos 46-52 is unsightly and detracts from the Arts and Crafts cottages of Priory Place. Especially given the proposed increase in height, a considerable effort needs to be made to give the rear façade more character and to rise above the utilitarian.
- 3.4 Is there a reason why the flat roof to the rear should not be used for solar panels?

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